

Topic 7

Maintaining Good Parent/Teacher Relationships

Ways for the parent to maintain a positive working relationship with his/her child's teachers and therapists are suggested in this topic. Prior to the child's transition, share suggestions from this topic for the parents/guardians to use once the child is in their new placement.

Materials

- "What Parents Can Do to Build and Nurture Relationships with School Personnel"
- Some form of notebook to send back and forth between home and school

The parent should understand that building good relationships takes time, but is definitely worth the effort. Mutually supportive relationships with teachers/administrators can lead to superior outcomes for the parent and child. Things may not fall into place immediately. Patience can pay off as long as there is consistent progress. Parents should continue to be an advocate for their child after transition by taking part in the child's education in any way they can. Encourage them to monitor the child's progress at school and participate in any school activity involving the child whenever possible. The child's progress should be presented to the parent through a regular report card or some type of progress report. Suggest to the parent that they offer their assistance to the teacher or the school. Both the teacher and administration will remember their positive involvement as well as concern for their child.

Ways to strengthen a positive family/school relationship include:

A. Monitoring Child Progress

1. Conference – individual meetings with the child's teachers, school administrators, tutors, therapists, and other professionals.
2. Classroom observation – prearranged visits to the classroom with the specific intent of observing some aspect of the child's learning activities.
3. Notebooks – Notes sent between home and the child's teacher and/or therapists in which the parent/guardian shares comments, suggestions, observations, etc. Notebooks can include a checklist of behavioral goals and objectives from the IEP.
4. Groups – Parents could pursue active participation in the local Parent-Teacher Association and in local parent support groups. These groups often provide excellent up-to-date information on programs and school services relevant to the child's IEP.
5. The child – Encourage the parent to ask the child (if applicable) how school is going: what are the most enjoyable activities in school, how much time does he/she spend in each class. Look over his/her homework.

B. Parent Participation

1. PTA – some schools may have a support group through the PTA for parents of special education students. Join the PTA or PTO at your child's school.
2. Special class treats – special treats or rewards are always welcomed. Find out from the teacher what types of treats or rewards would be appropriate for the class. Leave the treats in the office unless instructed otherwise.
3. Volunteering – find out from the school if volunteers are needed as classroom helpers or for school events. Is a room parent needed for the child's class?
4. Phone calls to parents - will be made before or after school or during planning time except in the case of extreme emergency.
5. Field Trips/Awards Programs/Field Day – Parents are encouraged to participate for the benefit of their child. It is a great way to have a fantastic time!

Sample Activities for the Early Interventionist and Family:

1. Discuss handout "What Can Parents Do?" (see page 7-3) with the family. Have them target some strategies they would be interested in trying after their child starts school.
2. Discuss the concept of a communication notebook, or other ways to communicate with the school staff. Make a sample page to share with the family.
3. Role play ways to communicate effectively with the school staff regarding a concern (child's diaper not being changed enough, problems on the bus, etc.).
4. Continue to build a contact list of all providers, administrators, etc.

Family Follow-Up

1. Begin a parent/teacher notebook and start by detailing a positive experience (or some significant progress that has happened recently for your child.)
2. Volunteer to help in your child's classroom or at the school. Be willing to help all the children in the class, not just your child.
3. Join the PTA – be an active member.
4. Review handout "What Can Parents Do" (see page 7-3) with another family member.

What Can Parents Do to Build and Nurture Relationships with School Personnel?

1. Start early getting to know all the people who will eventually be in a position to serve your child. Network! Start sharing your dreams and let them get to know your child. Then, when you are in a position to work together, there is a good basis for open communication and teamwork.
2. Recognize that school personnel are people too. Good educational outcomes for your child are not just dependent on you knowing your child's educational rights but also on you practicing good people skills.
3. Be willing to negotiate and make compromises or tradeoffs. Realize that the tradeoffs you make today can be made up for by different program options in the future.
4. Be open and listen. Try to remember that each new situation brings opportunities to start fresh. Don't assume that you're always going to have to fight.
5. Motivate and assist schools to develop programs that might not be possible or might not have been envisioned without your support.
6. When teachers/administrators have reservations or are resistant to your wants for your child, don't automatically become demanding. Take the role of educator and help them understand why you want what you do. You may have thought of objectives for your child and ways of meeting them that they haven't.
7. Give positive feedback and support to the people involved with your child. Everyone needs a pat on the back for the things he or she is doing right. When a problem or complaint arises, seek a solution at the source. Going behind someone's back to deal with a problem can damage trust. Go through the appropriate procedures and steps in the chain of command in solving problems.
8. Be committed to the choices you make and realize that you play a major role in their success.
9. Understand that building good relationships takes time. Things may not fall into place immediately. Patience can pay off as long as there is consistent progress. Mutually supportive relationships with teachers/ administrators will lead to superior outcomes for your child and you.

Adapted from The National Newspanch newsletter - Pauletta Feldman and Mary Ann Reynolds (1996)